

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH AIR FORCE LIEUTENANT COLONEL EDWARD "HERTZ" VAUGHAN, COMMANDER, 13TH EXPEDITIONARY SUPPORT SQUADRON AND DEPUTY COMMANDER, 13TH AIR EXPEDITIONARY GROUP JOINT TASK FORCE-SUPPORT FORCES ANTARCTICA SUBJECT: DOD SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (NSF) RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION IN ANTARCTICA TIME: 3:03 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2010

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CHRISTEN MCCLUNEY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd welcome to you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, November 3rd, 2010. My name is Christen McCluney with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs and I will be moderating our call today.

A note to bloggers on the line, please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Please respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point, and please place your phones on mute when you're not asking questions today. Also as a note, there is a slight delay on the line today, so please keep that in mind. Today, our guest is Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Edward Vaughan, commander, 13th Expeditionary Support Squadron and deputy commander, 13th Air Expeditionary Group Joint Task Force-Support Forces Antarctica. He will discuss the support the Department of Defense provides to the National Science Foundation's research and exploration in Antarctica.

We're pleased to have our guest today. Sir, you can start with any remarks and then we will go into questions. The floor is yours.

COL. VAUGHAN: Thank you. Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here live from McMurdo Station, Antarctica. And for the men and women who are here supporting the National Science Foundation as part of the DOD's Joint Task Force, I'd just like to say thanks for -- thanks for your interest in what we're doing, and I appreciate everybody who's linking in to either read about this or listen it to live.

As an overview, the Department of Defense plays a support role to the National Science Foundation's research lead here through United States Antarctic Program. The DOD asked commander U.S. PACOM back in 2005 to basically take the lead and be the supported command for this. At

that time, the commander of U.S. PACOM created the Joint Task Force-Support Forces Antarctica, and aligned under that joint task force are all of the military support to the National Science Foundation's program.

One of the unique things about this mission is the DOD does play an important role, but it is strictly a support role. And so the broader strategic decisions and even day-to-day operational decisions on priorities for the support are made at the NSF level.

As far as the working relationships and how the experience is for everybody that's down here, it would be -- I think you could describe it as cooperative and a very good partnership. But at the end of the day, all the way up to three-star general that's the joint task force commander, everyone's aligned behind the NSF and their objectives here.

So in that spirit, I'll say that we have -- we have members of the United States Air Force, the Navy, the Reserve and Guard, a total force for all of those, as well as we have at least one member of the United States Army that participates each year. And the Coast Guard comes over from their DHS role and supports this mission from time to time as well.

So with that, I'll leave that as an introduction, and I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Okay, Scott, you were first on the line, so you can go ahead with your question.

Q Okay. Well, I'm going to not burn up my first questions by asking if it's cold down there, because I just assume that it is.

I was wondering, you know, since I cover the Air Force, I'm kind of curious about what the Air Force presence looks like down there in terms of personnel, aircraft, that kind of stuff.

COL. VAUGHAN: For the -- for the Air Force presence you have -- the organization is the 13th Air Expeditionary Group. And right now the commander is Colonel Gary James, who is the operations group commander at the 109th Airlift Wing in the New York Air National Guard, Scotia, New York. And he has forward deployed to McMurdo. Under his command, on the air side, are the 304th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, which are C-17s, and that's based in Christchurch, New Zealand, as well as the 139th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, which are the LC-130s, and that's -- they are forward based at McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

So the lay-down of the -- of the Air Forces here, if you will, are a C-17 detachment of roughly 60 folks at Christchurch, and somewhere between 120 and 130 folks at McMurdo Station. Along with them and at both locations are support functions who don't fall necessarily within a traditional airlift squadron. We have personnel, finance, supply, these kind of functions that you would see on any deployment, communications, and they align under the AEG as well.

Q Okay. (That's cool ?).

And, sir, there was something else that just slipped my mind here. So -- COL. VAUGHAN: I could talk a little bit about the airplanes. The C-17 is obviously --

Q Sure.

COL. VAUGHAN: They play a significant role with the intercontinental airlift, and primarily for this mission that is flying from Christchurch, New Zealand, to McMurdo Station. And they do this two to three times per week, nominally. When you get a situation like we've had recently, where poor weather has, you know, canceled or delayed some of their flights, they have the capability to fly more frequently to catch up on the schedule.

The commander of that C-17 forward squadron, the 304th EAS, is Lieutenant Colonel Robert Wellington. The C-17 and all of -- all their folks are from Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state, and they do an absolutely fantastic job with the intercontinental airlift. But the mission is really quite different from the LC-130s who are based at McMurdo. And their primary mission is to fly on-continent missions to some of the outposts, like the South Pole, and then numerous scientific stations around the continent that are manned on a seasonal basis.

Q And how many different outposts are around the continent?

COL. VAUGHAN: Let's see, I don't have an -- I don't have an exact count here. There are -- there are many outposts that are not directly supported by the DOD. There are some -- there are smaller aircraft here, Baslers, which are modified DC-3 on skis; there are Twin Otters, which is a smaller twin-engine aircraft on skis, and helicopters. If you add in all the stations supported by those and then some that are supplied by an overland traverse, it's dozens and dozens of very small stations, some as small as one or two people. Usually those are fairly close to McMurdo. And you've got other stations; for example, there's Siple Dome, Byrd, WAIS Divide, which is Western Antarctic Ice Sheet. There's a new one up there on the central Trans-Antarctic Mountains near Beardmore Glacier that's going to be very active this year.

Sites that the LC-130s will fly into, I'd say it's -- there's right around 10 primary sites that we might see in a given season. But based on the science -- and again, like we said, the science has the lead -- there are other locations that we may need to get into.

Q All right.

And you just talked about the C-17s moving -- (either ?) flying between Christchurch and Antarctica. Are they primarily bringing supplies in and out, whereas I guess the LC-130s are moving people. Is that -- is that safe to say?

COL. VAUGHAN: No, the C-17s bring cargo and people. And like I said, they're the primary movement of people, cargo, any support that we need at McMurdo from the air side. They primarily bring that from

Christchurch to McMurdo. Then from McMurdo, if you think of McMurdo as a logistics hub for the rest of the continent for the U.S. program, that's where you get the LC-130s with the heavy ski- lift, and then some of those smaller assets, the Baslers and the Twin Otters and the helicopters from there.

Q Okay. And can you tell me a bit about what life is like, I guess, in McMurdo? I mean, what's it like on a -- on a daily basis?

COL. VAUGHAN: Well, it's interesting. I compare this to some of the other places where I've deployed in the desert, and it's not unlike other deployments, with a couple of exceptions. One is, McMurdo Station is 90 percent civilian, so the military presence here represents -- out of 1,200 people currently -- we roughly have between 1,100 and 1,200 on-station -- we've got about 120 of those are military.

And it used to be that McMurdo was -- you'd say it was color-coded because the military wore the green parkas, scientists wore red parkas and the -- most of the support contract workers wore the brown Carhartt-type parkas and jackets. That's not so much the case any more, and you see a lot of just standard-issue red U.S. Antarctic program jackets walking around.

But in any given situation, whether it's a dining facility or an operations meeting or folks mustering in the -- in the passenger terminal, you'll see primarily civilians here. And so that creates an interesting working environment, where some of the rule sets are different, some of the priorities are a little bit different. And I think it's very good for our -- for our military folks to work in these kind of places, because that's where you see missions all around the world tending toward sort of a whole-of-government effort and it's real good experience.

Q Okay. And what about -- what about things to do during down time? I mean, what's there to do in terms of distractions?

COL. VAUGHAN: Well, that's interesting. The people come down here. It's a six-hour -- six-day-a-week work week, and a nominal 12-hour-a-day shift. With the 24-hour daylight during the austral summer -- you do have opportunities to get outside. There are -- there are some hiking trails around here, if the weather permits. And I know a lot of folks in their off-time like to -- like to go on the large loops for hiking. There's Nordic skiing. They'll occasionally open up some of the ice roads and snow roads that go to the runways, depending upon the conditions, and let folks ski on those. There are -- there's a coffee house here. There are a lot of folks that play music, and get together and do those kind of things.

But if you were to just walk through McMurdo any time of day, really, or night, you'd get a sense that the people here are focused on work, and work is the -- you know, and their job and the mission, is kind of the primary focus. So all of these other distractions, as you put it, on the -- on the outside are really ancillary.

Q And I guess for the Air Force a normal deployment would be the entire season? Is that correct?

COL. VAUGHAN: No. And actually, that's an interesting -- that's an interesting question. For the C-17s -- C-17s' command and control is split, and their primary operational control remains out at the United States Transportation Command which, through AMC, has command authority down through Joint Base Lewis-McChord. And so the C-17 detachment every three or four weeks rotates the actual (tail ?) -- the C-17 asset, the airplane. And it rotates, and they bring in a new (tail ?) number.

And they do that for a lot of reasons. The Air Force has maintenance programs, and things to keep the hours leveled, kind of, on the fleet. But the other reason that that's convenient for them is that it allows them to rotate some of their forces. And so you have a few key folks, like the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Wellington, who will stay here for the whole season at Christchurch. But most of his people will rotate every month to six weeks; and by exception, they'll stay longer than that.

For the LC-130 squadron that's down here at McMurdo, you'll have a handful of people that stay for the majority of the season, sometimes the whole season. But typically, you've got members of the total force -- so the Air National Guard, in this case -- and they'll come down here for two-, three-, four-week stints. Sometimes they'll do that twice in a season. They'll come down for a month in the beginning, a month at the end. And really, it's up to the force-providing unit to manage all those schedules.

Q Okay. And I think this is pretty much -- pretty much what we got, but I would be -- I'd be remiss if I didn't ask, because I used to work in Tacoma, Washington. If the guys out of Lewis-McChord -- are they 62nd Airlift Wing? Are they 446th? Are they a mixture of both?

COL. VAUGHAN: That's a great question, and I'm glad you asked it. It's a mix. It's an absolutely total force. You got -- the 446th Airlift Wing is the Reserve Wing at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and the 62nd of course is the active-duty wing.

The actual C-17 aircraft are assigned to the 62nd Airlift Wing, but all the air crew -- and they fly -- they mix the crews, they fly interchangeably. The leadership -- why you've got -- Lieutenant Colonel Wellington is part of the 62nd Airlift Wing. His DOs, aircraft commanders, instructor pilots could come from either one.

Q Okay. Great.

Got you. I think that is pretty much all I got --

MS. MCCLUNEY: Okay.

Q -- so I appreciate your chatting with me.

MS. MCCLUNEY: We received a question from e-mails. I wanted to know what exactly type of research are you doing with the National Science Foundation?

COL. VAUGHAN: That's good. That gives me an opportunity to kind of lay out how it works. The Air Force is not conducting research here per se. And our primary role and what we're all focused on doing is supporting the National Science Foundation's Research.

There are many, many different projects that are funded by the National Science Foundation, and they're led by some world leading scientists. And it's very exciting to be here. You know, our role is to provide the logistics, to provide them the airlift, to get them out to the locations where they need to go, to make sure that their team and their equipment get to and from New Zealand to Antarctica as needed.

But they -- the scientists are generous enough on -- really, I think it's two or three times a week they'll come out into either the dining facility or other lecture halls and provide briefings and lectures on the science that's going on.

I'll point out a couple of them. Really, if you go to the National Science Foundation's website, [nsf.gov](http://nsf.gov), or from there link to the U.S. Antarctic Program website, there are lists of the types of science and research that's going on here. And I can't list all of them for you. It's quite a bit.

But a couple of the exciting ones or more visible ones -- we just -- we just saw the conclusion of a product -- project called Concordiasi, which is a international effort, led primarily by the French space agency. It's CNES, which is the French equivalent of NASA. And there's a team from France down there. They launch balloons that go up and study the atmosphere, and these balloons travel very high. They're superpressure. And I did a blog on that, if you go to our Armed with Science Dispatches from Antarctica blog.

But it's very exciting to see that. You see the weather balloon come up first. It was this kind of yellow smaller dirigible-shaped windsock balloon, and once that went up, you knew that a Concordiasi balloon launch was imminent. And folks would gather and -- you know, who didn't have other things to do at that moment would gather for a few minutes and watch the balloon launch. It's quite exciting.

But there's a lot of other science that you -- that happened in the labs and that happened in the field camps. There's a Dr. Gretchen Hofmann, out of UC Santa Barbara, is leading an effort to study the acidification of the oceans based on CO2 absorption. She and her team presented some of their notes and some of their work in a lecture a couple of weeks ago, and that's quite exciting. But there -- there's many projects going on down here, and again, the National Science Foundation is responsible for funding them or collaborating with the international community to make those happen.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Okay. And what has been one of your biggest challenges while there?

COL. VAUGHAN: Absolutely the biggest challenge for us -- and, I think, in all phase of the operation -- is prioritization. And you have a flying schedule here that if the weather were perfect every day and you flew that schedule, you could probably get pretty close to accomplishing all the objectives for the season.

But of course this is Antarctica. The weather is noncooperative. And so, you know, you start getting into situations where you have a very narrow window to launch a mission or a narrow window to recover a flight. Sometimes it's the weather here in McMurdo. Oftentimes it's the weather at wherever you're going, out into the field camps.

And so on a given day, you have cargo, passengers, fuel that need to get to various places, and how do you prioritize that? That's kind of the biggest challenge. The National Science Foundation is responsible for telling us what their priorities are, but sometimes they may have a priority to get cargo to the South Pole on a given set of days, and the South Pole weather doesn't permit it.

So we go to the next level, okay, what's next, you know? Let's download that cargo and put something else on the plane because the weather's good out at some other site. And that's really a challenge. It's an art, and there's some luck involved. What we hope is that across the season, across the whole five months, it all kind of levels out and we can get everything where they need to go.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Well, thank you, sir.

Scott, do you have any final questions?

Q I think I'm good. I just want to thank you for chatting with me for a few minutes.

MS. MCCLUNEY: All right.

COL. VAUGHAN: Yeah, if I -- do I have a chance to add something here at the end --

MS. MCCLUNEY: Sure, you can go ahead and do your final statement now.

COL. VAUGHAN: Okay, great. And again, it's a joint task force, so it's not all Air Force and airlift. I know that's some of the focus of the blogger roundtable here. But the Navy, of course, has a long history in this mission dating back to the days of Admiral Byrd and the International Geophysical Year at the end of the 1950s, and it was a -- its been a Navy detachment, and the Navy provided support to U.S. and international science for many decades.

The Navy is still very actively involved in the mission as part of the joint task force. And through Military Sealift Command, each season, two ships come to McMurdo in late January, early February. One is a tanker ship for fuel for the stations and the other is a cargo ship. Those same ships also haul retrograde waste out of here since the National Science Foundation is very serious and careful about making sure that the waste that is generated gets returned.

Additionally, we've got the Navy Cargo Handling Battalion 1, affectionately known as the NAVCHAPs, although I don't think they like that name anymore. But anyway, those folks do fantastic work. It's a group of Navy personnel who travel down here with the purpose of onloading and offloading the ships. And then there are lots of other smaller groups and detachments of Coast Guard and Navy. So while the Air Force and the air power is quite dramatic and makes for good videos and reading, the Navy really does provide an indispensable role here in support of the National Science Foundation.

MS. MCCLUNEY: Well, thank you, sir.

Today's program will be available online at the bloggers roundtable link on [dodlive.mil](http://dodlive.mil), where you will be able to access a story based on today's call, along with source documents such as bios, audio files and print transcripts.

Again, thank you, sir, and for our bloggers and journalists who participated today.

This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at any time.

Thank you, Lieutenant Colonel Vaughan.

END.